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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: WTO BIOTECH PUBLIC DIPLOMACY EFFORTS

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CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR HOWARD F. JETER.
REASON: 1.5 B & D.

¶11. (U) The GON and the Nigerian public are split on the issue of biotechnology. Senior GON officials and farmers recognize that biotechnology promises improved agricultural productivity. President Obasanjo has said, "I am convinced that the only reliable way forward for rapid biotechnological development in the country is a close and sustained collaboration among government, researchers and industry." Former Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Mallam Adamu Bello said, "I'm not a scientist, but from information available to me, it appears clear that modern biotechnology holds high promise."

¶12. (U) However, many agricultural experts in both the private and public sectors have close professional connections to Europe and are sympathetic to European opinions. This is particularly true of Nigeria's limited agricultural export sector, which exports mainly to Europe (though sometimes through third countries--such as India--where processing takes place) and could face the dilemma of having to chose between biotechnology and continued access to European markets.

¶13. (C) In Nigeria, biotechnology is not generally viewed as a tool used by the developed world to keep developing countries impoverished. However, the WTO is often perceived in that light and is publicly criticized as an arm of the developed world. The Embassy, therefore, recommends that any biotechnology outreach initiative focus on the positive impact that biotechnology could have in Nigeria. The outreach should not focus primarily on the WTO case against Europe. Such a focus might obfuscate the issue by causing Nigerians to believe that support for biotechnology and WTO are one in the same, and such belief would not advance our interests.

¶14. (U) The Embassy's ongoing efforts in support of biotechnology include a proposed U.S. press tour for Nigerian journalists who cover biotechnology issues and a comprehensive USAID proposal to support GON biotech efforts through a Nigeria Agriculture Biotechnology Program. In 2002, a large delegation from Iowa, led by the Governor, visited Nigeria and extensively discussed biotechnology issues. The University of Iowa expressed interest in doing work here, but there has been little follow-up. Monsanto has also been a frequent visitor to Nigeria.

Background on Biotechnology in Nigeria

¶15. (U) The GON national policy on biotechnology states: "Nigeria should, as a priority, initiate appropriate steps to explore the use of biotechnology for the benefit of Nigerians and furthermore, ensure that Nigeria becomes a key participant in the international biotechnology enterprise within a decade. This will be pursued through the provision of an enabling environment that responds to the needs of the biotech industry, the research and development communities as well as relevant national and international biotech concerns."

¶16. (U) In early 2002, the Federal Executive Council (Cabinet) approved bio-safety guidelines that name the National Bio-Safety Committee (NBC) as the nationally competent authority for approving applications for the development, importation, testing, release and/or commercialization of GMOs or their products. The Ministry of Environment is responsible for developing the guidelines under which the NBC would approve an application, while the Ministry of Science and Technology would be responsible for implementing those guidelines.

17. (U) On the research side, the Ministry of Science and Technology oversees the National Biotechnology Development Agency (NBDA), a government agency responsible for coordinating all biotechnology activities in Nigeria. NBDA had a 2002 budget of approximately N167 million (about \$1.3 million). The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Ministry of Environment also play key roles in biotechnology research. In addition, the GON established an advanced biotechnology laboratory within the Sheda Science Complex (SHESTCO) near Abuja in 2002.

18. (U) Comment: The positive actions and statements by the GON hold promise for the development of a national capacity in biotechnology that can spur growth in the agricultural sector. However, constraints include the realities of Nigeria's current (primarily European) export markets, institutional and bureaucratic conflict, lack of scientific capacity, and a need to dispel myths related to genetically engineered foods. End Comment.

JETER